

VZCZCXRO6419
OO RUEHBW
DE RUEHMO #1270 1271348
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 061348Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7931
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHDX/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 001270

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/06/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: RUSSIA: NOT SEEKING CONFLICT WITH GEORGIA, BUT
WILL DEFEND INTERESTS

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells: Reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) In a May 6 farewell call with the Ambassador, Chief of General Staff General Yuri Baluyevskiy said that Russia was concerned by the danger of a military conflict in the Caucasus. Citing Russian intelligence, Baluyevskiy warned that Georgia could "go to the extreme," which could lead to conflict. While Russia was not seeking a fight with Georgia, it would protect its interests in the region. The Ambassador underscored that the U.S. appreciated the seriousness of the Georgia-Abkhaz conflict and had counseled restraint to all parties. There was no military solution to the situation, and the Ambassador urged Russia to show restraint. The Ambassador noted U.S. strong concern over recent GOR actions that had served to undercut Georgian territorial integrity. Baluyevskiy repeated that Russia was not interested in a conflict. Recalling his experience as a military commander in the first Russian peacekeeping battalion in Abkhazia during the 1994 period of hostilities, Baluyevskiy noted the significant loss of life and said "we cannot allow this to occur again." Russia was not fear-mongering, he said, but wanted the U.S. to understand this was an issue that "should only be tabled at the negotiating table."

¶2. (C) In a separate conversation on May 6, Chief of the MOD International Agreements Department General Buzhinskiy argued to us that the possibility of a NATO MAP offer had escalated tensions in the region, and asked "do you really want a proxy war with Russia?" In response to the U.S. call for restraint, Buzhinskiy accused Saakashvili of seeking a military confrontation and argued that, buoyed by the assumption of U.S. support, the Georgian leadership could miscalculate. Buzhinskiy commented that the increase in Russian peacekeepers was in line with the 1994 Moscow Treaty limits, but was prompted by the Georgian military buildup, with Russia clearly signaling to Tbilisi that it would thwart a Georgian military invasion of the separatist territory. Buzhinskiy charged Georgia with seeking to force a solution to Abkhazia, in the face of deep historical, cultural, and political divisions.

¶3. (C) Also on May 6, the Ambassador used a farewell luncheon hosted by Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Kislyak to underscore the danger that the military buildup and counter-accusations could easily get out of hand. Kislyak had no substantive response, but Duma International Relations Committee Chairman Konstantin Kosachev interjected that neither the U.S. nor Georgia should underestimate how dug-in Russia was over the prospect of a Georgian MAP.

¶4. (C) Comment: While recognizing the danger of miscalculation, many in the political and military leadership welcome Georgian warnings of war as a useful reminder to NATO of the risks in proceeding with MAP at the December NATO Ministerial.
BURNS